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ABSTRACT

As oral communication becomes a more substantial feature of courses in disciplines other than speech communication, faculty members in other disciplines need to develop the ability to assess oral communication competence in their classrooms. Faculty development workshops can teach colleagues these skills, using consultations with faculty members who can tell how they applied what they learned in earlier workshops, practicing the assessment of sample student performances provided on tape or in person, and providing follow-up sessions periodically after the formal workshop is over. Fundamental issues involved include (1) whether form and content are related; (2) how much communication depends on its context; and (3) whether evaluation should be analytic or holistic. Classroom assignments--oral reports, debates, and role-playing--can incorporate speech communication into different disciplines. However, using a wide variety of speaking and listening assignments requires a broad range of methods for assessing student performance, including rating scales, which translate easily into numerical scores; check lists, based on the completion of specified behavioral objectives; holistic evaluation, where judgment is seen as a contextual adaptation; and peer evaluation. Problems faced by faculty seeking to implement speaking skills include how to evaluate listening, and how to deal with students who never speak in class, or who demonstrate a high level of anxiety. (Ten references are appended.) (MM)

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TEACHING COLLEAGUES IN OTHER DISCIPLINES TO ASSESS COMMUNICATION COMPETENCY

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TEACHING COLLEAGUES IN OTHER DISCIPLINES TO ASSESS COMMUNICATION COMPETENCY

This paper is designed to review considerations and procedures appropriate for assisting faculty members in disciplines other than speech communication to assess the speaking and listening skills of students in their own classrooms.

Faculty development programs, beginning with a notable surge in the 1970s, have become increasingly prevalent in colleges and universities (Gaff, 1975; Centra, 1976). In these programs, teachers in every field are being urged to make greater use of "active modes of teaching and learning" (Involvement In Learning, 1985, p. 27). Faculty who are expanding their repertoires of teaching resources are searching for ways to increase student participation in their classes.

With the exploration of active teaching modes came a sensitivity to the role of speaking and listening throughout the institution. Instructors of economics, for instance, have testified that introducing oral communication processes in their courses has provided the students "with a sense of ownership of their product and of the class" (Field, Wachter, and Catanese, 1985, p. 216). In a number of cases, institution-wide programs have been established to ensure the existence of speaking-intensive courses in the curriculum (Weiss, 1982; Roberts, 1983; Loacker, at al., 1984;

Steinfatt, 1986). We have, then, a relatively fresh phenomenon, Speaking and Listening Across Disciplines (SALAD).

As oral communication becomes a more substantial feature of their courses, faculty members start thinking about how to evaluate the behaviors which they have encouraged in their students. They voice a concern about "assigning and evaluating oral presentations" (Cooper and Galvin, 1986, p.4). Not infrequently the concern about evaluation leads them to the instruments and processes which speech communication professionals have found useful. Teaching our colleagues appropriate evaluation methods for speaking and listening then becomes a responsibility of those of us in this field.

Because most of the information I will be presenting here is based upon my experience at DePauw University, let me give you a quick picture of what is going on there. At DePauw, every student as a graduation requirement must enroll in at least one designated "speaking intensive" course. (Similar requirements exist in writing and mathematics.) The grade sheets for these courses have a separate column for indicating whether the oral communication of the student has been judged competent in that course. The rather complex supporting system for this graduation requirement includes a preliminary assessment of all freshmen students (Note 1), a Speaking and Listening Center to provide assistance to students in all disciplines, and faculty workshops to train faculty members who will offer and conduct the speech

intensive courses. (They can't so designate their courses unless they complete the workshop.)

Before going further, let me make a distinction and then blur it a little. The distinction is between (1) evaluating a student's oral communication performance in a course and (2) evaluating the student's comprehension of the content of the course as expressed through oral performance.

In the speech intensive courses (known as "S" courses) at DePauw, instructors are expected to evaluate oral communication per se. The instructor's evaluation is employed explicitly as an oral communication assessment procedure by the university. As mentioned, there's a separate column on the grade sheet where this assessment is recorded. Thus a student may pass a course (on the basis of written tests, papers, laboratories, etc.) and still not be given credit for oral communication competence, and vice versa. Speaking and listening competence is evaluated in such courses much as they might be in a speech class.

More common in higher education, of course, is the situation where faculty members in any discipline evaluate a student's understanding of the material of the course itself (philosophy, biology, etc.) through oral assignments, much as they would grade written evidences of comprehension. Grades based on oral participation may constitute a certain percentage of the final grade in the course. As a milder version of this procedure, some teachers will "nudge" a grade upward for superior class participation.

In practice the distinction between "content" and its

commuication is considerably blurred. A poorly organized oral report suggests a lack of understanding about the subject matter of a discipline, just as may an inappropriate (though factually "correct") response during a class discussion, or a relevant vocabulary and even a sophisticated vocal inflection may positively indicate an especially firm grasp of the field. Likewise, when one is judging communication competence, knowing what one is talking about is a highly relevant consideration. The "good speaker" who doesn't know what he is talking about, no matter how many votes he may get in a Presidential election, is not to be rewarded in the academy. Thus judgments about communication and knowledge overlap considerably in actual practice. Content and its communication are strongly interwoven.

Our concern here will be to describe procedures used in faculty workshops which have been conducted to assist teachers across the curriculum to assess oral communication competence in their classrooms. The same procedures would be applicable for helping any faculty members who plan to incorporate a substantial oral communication component in their courses.

After a description of the general features of such faculty development workshops, attention will be given to (1) addressing fundamental issues, (2) surveying oral communication assignments, (3) assessment instruments, and (4) special problems. Finally, some reflections about faculty attitudes toward oral communication will be presented.

Workshops

Faculty development is currently a full-blown enterprise in many institutions, and "workshops" are usually an important part of it. The most engaging feature of such workshops, it turns out, is the atmosphere of camaraderie and sharing that frequently develops. "Teaching" colleagues, about oral communication or any other subject, often consists of mutually sharing and discovering the frequently imaginative and provocative things we and these colleagues are doing in our various disciplines.

Normal workshop procedures reflect the sharing atmosphere in relying heavily upon discussion and reports from members about what they are doing or planning, supplemented by the ubiquitous "hand-outs," talks by visiting consultants, and exercises of various kinds. Three items which have proven especially helpful in workshops on assessing oral communication across the curriculum are (1) consultations with faculty members who have taken earlier workshops and can tell how they applied what they learned, (2) practice in assessing sample student peformances provided on tape or in person, and (3) adequate follow-up in refresher sessions held periodically after the formal workshop is over. Attached is an outline of a typical faculty workshop in this area at DePauw University.

Addressing Fundamental Issues

In evaluating oral communication in their classrooms, instructors will naturally make assumptions concerning the nature of communication, the learning process, tests and evaluation, and the expectations of competence. In figuring out how to assess speaking and listening, we begin by finding our position with regard to some fundamental issues. The idea is not to indoctrinate anyone, but to make sure that the inevitable choices of position are based upon a considered and informed deliberation.

Treatment of fundamental issues with respect to communication itself is especially important. For instance, one of the most basic issues is "How are form and content related?" Some faculty members will take the position that content has an independent existence, and the form it takes in communication is essentially a representation or reflection of that content. Other individuals may take another pole and say that all content consists of structure, and that whenever we communicate we are "creating" reality or knowledge. Points of view are available all along this continuum. In evaluating a message an instructor will need to consider whether that message is expected to match a posited reality or to be seen as a freshly structured creation.

A second fundamental communication issue might be "Where does meaning reside?" Is the message whatever the instructor gets out of the symbols being expressed by the student? Or

would it be the meaning derived by the other students in the class, who are, after all, its intended audience? Or is the "meaning" encompassed in the intent of the speaker who makes the utterance? Which message are we evaluating?

A third issue in communication which any faculty member will have to face is "How much does communication depend on its context?" Some will subscribe to the doctrine that good speech is always good speech. Others will assume that speech which may be regarded as good in one situation may be poor in another.

There are a number of other fundamental issues in communication which may be addressed depending upon the aims of the teachers. For instance, an answer to the question, "How much does communication depend upon language?", may influence evaluations considerably. One instructor may see speaking as "writing on its hind legs," simply language uttered out loud, while another viewpoint will be that communication is a complex set of social behaviors with nonverbal symbols constituting an important element.

Going beyond such issues in communication will get us into important questions about learning, about testing, and about competence which all teachers who do any grading of any kind have to consider.

In our view of the learning process we raise such issues as "What is the role of the student?" (to be enlightened by subject-matter experts or to be engaged in a learning environment) and "How do we learn?" (through correction or through reinforcement). If the answer to the first one

indicates that a facilitative environment and sharing of ideas is the desideratum, then the teacher plays as big a part in the communication process as the student does. If the communication is poor, who gets the bad grade, the student or the teacher? On many of these questions, of course, intermediate positions are available.

Among the potentially relevant issues with regard to testing is the question, "Should evaluation be analytic or holistic?" Some teachers will expect to rate students on a number of explicit criteria, while others prefer making more global judgments about a performance as a whole.

Judgments about general competence will be more important at DePauw than in most other programs, but a position on an issue such as "How cognitive is competence?" may be relevant to others. This is, after all, an issue which is central to a definition of communication competence. Is it enough just to perform adequately, or should students also know what they're doing?

Developing a viewpoint on such issues provides a basis for making satisfying evaluations of oral communication in the classroom.

Surveying Assignments

Faculty members from different disciplines having different approaches to teaching may become interested in implementing a wide range of oral communication assignments, going well beyond traditional class discussion and oral

reports. Part of the process of assisting them in evaluating speaking and listening is surveying such assignment possibilities.

There are a multitude of formats and uses of speaking and listening which have possibly not occurred to instructors in a given subject or which they are reluctant to use because they don't know much about them. Instructors quite frequently ask questions such as "How exactly do you go about setting up class debates?" Most teachers have tried breaking larger classes into smaller groups for discussion purposes, but aren't so aware of the varieties of structure and purposes available in group work. Buzz groups, project groups, brainstorming groups, and others may give variety to a course and help meet educational objectives more effectively. One of the most underutilized activities is oral reading, which sometimes turns out to be much more educational and meaningful than original student discourse. Or "role-playing" may be introduced as a form of speaking and listening suitable for classrooms as diverse as history and ecology, one which many instructors have not seriously considered. Finally, but hardly exhaustively, audio and videotaping have become almost universally accessible in classrooms, providing new opportunties for imaginative applications to the learning process.

This is a portion of a workshop where sharing of experience is especially appropriate. In one workshop, for instance, a philosophy professor introduced us to a "referat" system, under which one member of a class is assigned to take

notes on each day's class discussion and distribute copies of the notes to the other students. A history teacher explained a complex format for conducting role-playing debates in his Irish history course. Most instructors have some assignment variations which they have found conducive to learning in their own courses.

We may suggest that auxiliary speaking and listening components be added to the assignments which are already part of the course syllabus. Requiring an oral report along with a written paper is a typical maneuver. Requiring that interview procedures be used as a research method or that students consult among themselves as they prepare their research will provide additional oral communication elements even when the performance cannot be evaluated by the instructor's direct observation. (Such activities may be evaluated indirectly through notebooks and diaries, if they wish, however.) The concept of "intervention" is one worth introducing in connection with assignments, also. Intervention, taking such forms as a conference with the instructor prior to giving an oral report or panel discussion, helps to bridge the gap between giving a speaking assignment to the students and having it completed in class.

Introducing a number of usable sample assignments to flesh out the survey of available options provides concrete examples to be emulated. One of the more popular "hand-outs" in the DePauw workshops is a so-called "Recipe Book," which presents not only the ingredients of a good assignment, but examples of specific assignments and syllabi from speaking

intensive courses which have been offered in various disciplines in the past.

As far as evaluation goes, all of these varied assignments may be used to judge speaking competence or knowledge of the subject-matter of the course, or both. This means that as they are adopted special attention must be given to appropriate methods of judging them. There are differences between evaluating a debate and an oral reading for instance. Appropriate instruments or observational methods must ordinarily be considered along with the assignment variation.

Assessment Instruments

Faculty who are utilizing a wide variety of speaking and listening assignments will require a similarly broad range of methods for assessing student performance. To help them out, we can provide a relatively systematic review of some of the common approaches to speech evaluation.

(Rating scales.) Teachers who are inclined toward analytical evaluation methods are especially attracted to rating scales of the sort found in instructor's manuals for speech textbooks. When rating scales are used, both the teacher and the student "know what they are looking for." Furthermore, such scales translate rather easily into numerical scores for grading purposes and the items on the scale can be adapted and modified according to the special needs of a given course. A faculty development workshop is a

good setting for surveying and developing forms of this kind.

Unfortunately, teachers who like to use these forms must be warned about the distortions, false precision, and other evaluation pitfalls which are characteristic of rating scales in speaking and listening. They need to be apprised of the possibilities of leniency, halo, and trait distortions (Bohn and Bohn, 1985). And if the standards are to have institution-wide significance, explicit training in using the scales will be necessary.

(Check-lists) The forms they use need not necessarily be scales, though. In an achievement-based situation the goals are explicit criterion-referenced behavioral objectives which are either met or not met. "Participate actively in each class discussion" might be such a goal. In the DePauw program, where competence evaluations do not have to be scored, and where "exit standards" for S-courses are specified, we rely considerably upon goal achievement of this kind.

(Holistic Evaluation) Where judgment is seen as a humanistic enterprise and contextual adaptation to a particular classroom is all-important, teachers may be encouraged to adopt holistic evaluation procedures. To judge one student to be "excellent" and another one as "fair" is manageable for experienced teachers. Scale items and check lists may then be used to identify strengths and weaknesses which contributed to the judgment.

(Other Methods) Instructors may also need to know that there are numerous other ways to evaluate oral communication,

as well. One may make judgments in terms of responses, for instance. The listeners may be tested over the material the presenter has purportedly covered, or the instructor may look at notes the other students have taken. The teacher may employ standard (or non-standard) discursive critical methods such as application of criteria, analogs, and generic systems. A complete course in rhetorical criticism is hardly feasible in a faculty development workshop, but faculty members may well be able to share the critical methods with which they are already familiar.

(Peer evaluation) The judgments of peers are not necessarily inappropriate as an instrument, either. After all, the peers are the persons to whom the communication is addressed. Their comments, and even their ratings, provide another supplemental option for an instructor to use.

Practical experience in using these methods, normally available in a workshop situation, may be important in familiarizing the faculty members with them and bringing to their attention the substantial disparities which may turn up in the results when administered by their various colleagues. A collection of videotapes of student presentations of reports and panels and performance in class discussions can serve as a basis for practice in evaluation and discussion of the application of evaluation instruments. Sometimes we have students come personally into the workshop to get a critique or we even visit an ongoing class. It should be remembered, for that matter, that communication is always contextual and the ultimate concern of an instructor in any discipline is

the efficacy of the speaking and listening as related to what is going on in a particular class in a particular discipline.

Familiarity with assessment methodologies and their employment in varying situations is one of those features of faculty development in speaking and listening which may be continually augmented through refresher meetings, mutual classroom visitation, and lunchtable conversation.

Special Problems

In any effort to assist faculty members across the curriculum to incorporate student speaking and listening behaviors explicitly into their courses and to evaluate these behaviors appropriately, we find that there are many phases of oral communication we can try to cover. Some of the topics which frequently come up in faculty workshops include giving assignments, public speaking, small group dynamics, leadership, language use, questions and answers, listening, and anxiety. Of these topics, "listening" and "anxiety" seem to pose special difficulties.

"Listening" remains one of the areas of the speech communication field where the recognition of its importance outruns the ability to teach and evaluate it. Increasing consideration, in terms of research and articles, textbooks, and organizations, is being given to this area. Still, there are few pat answers to be given to those who ask, especially, "How do I evaluate listening?" In a workshop, even "sharing"

procedures produce at best some anecdotal material, usually in the form of horror stories. In developing syllabi and assignments, teachers can be encouraged to incorporate specific listening features. As for evaluation, some directions which can be explored include (1) keeping track of overt listening behaviors such as nonverbal cues and appropriately referenced oral contributions, (2) evaluating feedback in terms of such factors as remembering and level of questions asked, and (3) noting ultimate success or failure to grasp material and concepts as exhibited in examinations and papers.

Most instructors are anxious about the anxiety of their students. They want to know how to deal with the students who don't talk at all in class or whose performance they observe to be impeded by apprehensive behaviors. The area of communication comprehension manifestly constitutes a second major difficulty in teaching and evaluating oral communication. Faculty members may be introduced gently to the extensive literature on the subject and concepts such as state and trait anxiety, unwillingness to communicate, rhetoritherapy, norms and roles, and phobic behavior in order to dispel any simplistic or universalized causal attributions instructors so often make. They may also be introduced to a range of relatively therapeutic measures, not excluding an examination of their own classroom behaviors which may intimidate students into silence. Finally, they can see what kinds of developmental and compensatory methods are available for making this element less decisive in the evaluation of

oral communication.

A workshop, then, may not produce final and comforting answers to classroom problems, but an increased awareness of their complexities may contribute to better use and evaluation of oral communication.

Some Attitudes

In any college faculty the climate of opinion about oral communication in general and student speaking and listening in particular is a mixed one. As one sorts out the attitudes of teachers one finds some that are conducive to utilization and evaluation of student speaking and listening and some which are less so.

In our experience most teachers do believe that students learn "better" when they participate in class and that student realization of a participation expectation leads them to prepare better for class. Many would agree that students can learn from one another and that student feedback can help the teacher to adapt material to student understanding. These attitudes lead faculty members to encourage oral participation.

Some other attitudes they have lead them in the other direction. Many instructors appear to be considerably bothered by questions of "fairness," for instance. The believe that evaluating students on their oral work does not seem fair to the ones who are not comfortable talking, and treating students equally seems much more difficult in oral

situations than when written examinations are used. They almost all think that they can't "cover" as much material when they allow student participation. Furthermore, criteria for judging oral participation and performance seem to some to be more ambiguous and difficult to apply than criteria for written work. And attention given explicitly to speaking and listening behaviors may detract from attention given to the subject matter of the course. Such attitudes, which may well be justified, constitute the environment in which we work when teaching our colleagues in various disciplines to assess the quality of speaking and listening in their classrooms.

In conclusion, a workshop approach to faculty developmnt seems to us to provide an appropriate method for teaching professors to evaluate and assess oral communication across the college or university curriculum. Such a workshop should include an orientation to important issues concerning communication, provide them with adequate assignment options and assessment instruments, and allow for the sharing of experience to generate a broader perspective on communication processes and standards.

NOTE

(Note 1) The present paper does not consider the task of training raters from other disciplines to administer such standard instruments as the Communication Competence Assessment Instrument. This training has also been part of the DePauw program. See Weiss, 1982.

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1986 FACULTY SUMMER WORKSHOP IN ORAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE

Tuesday, May 27	Resource Person: Thomas Steinfatt, Clarkson U.	
	Session 1	An approach to oral communication
	Session 2	Communication simulation
	Workshop Luncheon	
	Session 3	Review of course syllabi
	Session 4	Using communication "modules"
Wednesday, May 28	Session 5	Issues in communication competence
	Session 6	Conducting class discussion
Thursday, May 29	Resource Person: Tony Catanese	
	Session 7	Planning and evaluating class work
	Session 8	Dealing with speech anxiety
Friday, May 30	Session 9	Review of model assignments
Monday, June 2	Resource Person: Ann L. Weiss	
	Session 10	The Speaking and Listening Center
	Session 11	Review of exit standards
Tuesday, June 3	Resource Person: James Rambo	
	Session 12	"S" competence in foreign languages
	Session 13	Practicum in evaluating
Wednesday, June 4	Resource Person: Ernest Henninger	
	Session 14	Sharing of views
	Session 15	Stimulating class participation
Thursday, June 5	Session 16	Listening
	Session 17	Orienting students to an "S" course
Friday, June 6	Session 18	Presentation of syllabi
	Final Workshop Banquet	

Workshop Participants: Richard Curry, Arthur Evans, Walker Gilmer, Alan Pankratz, Donald Ryujin, Daniel Wachter, and Edward Ypma

Workshop Director: Robert Weiss